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THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE ITALIAN FRONT

AN important article by Professor Robert DeC. Ward, of Harvard University, printed in the February issue of *THE SCIENTIFIC MONTHLY*, treats the weather controls over the fighting in the Italian war zone. The number of the *Geographical Journal* for the same month contains an address of equal interest before the Royal Geographical Society by Major De Felippi on the relation of the geography of the region to the war. In discussing this address, the president of the society said that if the conduct of the war should be placed in the hands of the Royal Geographical Society, he doubted whether they would succeed in doing anything better than making a very considerable muddle of it. But it is none the less true that weather, climate and topography are fundamental factors in military operations.

Major De Felippi pointed out that the Italian-Austrian political frontier is 470 miles long, and the boundary line is so drawn that Austria holds the headwaters and upper courses of every one of the Italian rivers. There is not a small valley which is not held by Austria to within a short distance of its opening upon the plain. Austria possesses the whole basin of the Isonzo from its source to the sea. The political boundary bears no relation to any of the geographical features of the land. An equally important topographical feature of the frontier is the fact that with the longer stretch extending in a general direction from the west to east and the shorter section extending from north to south, the Italian army was always in danger of a flank attack.

When Italy attacked Austria, it could only advance in the Isonzo region, but every door leading into Italy was open to Austria. Thus in May, 1916, Austria attacked the

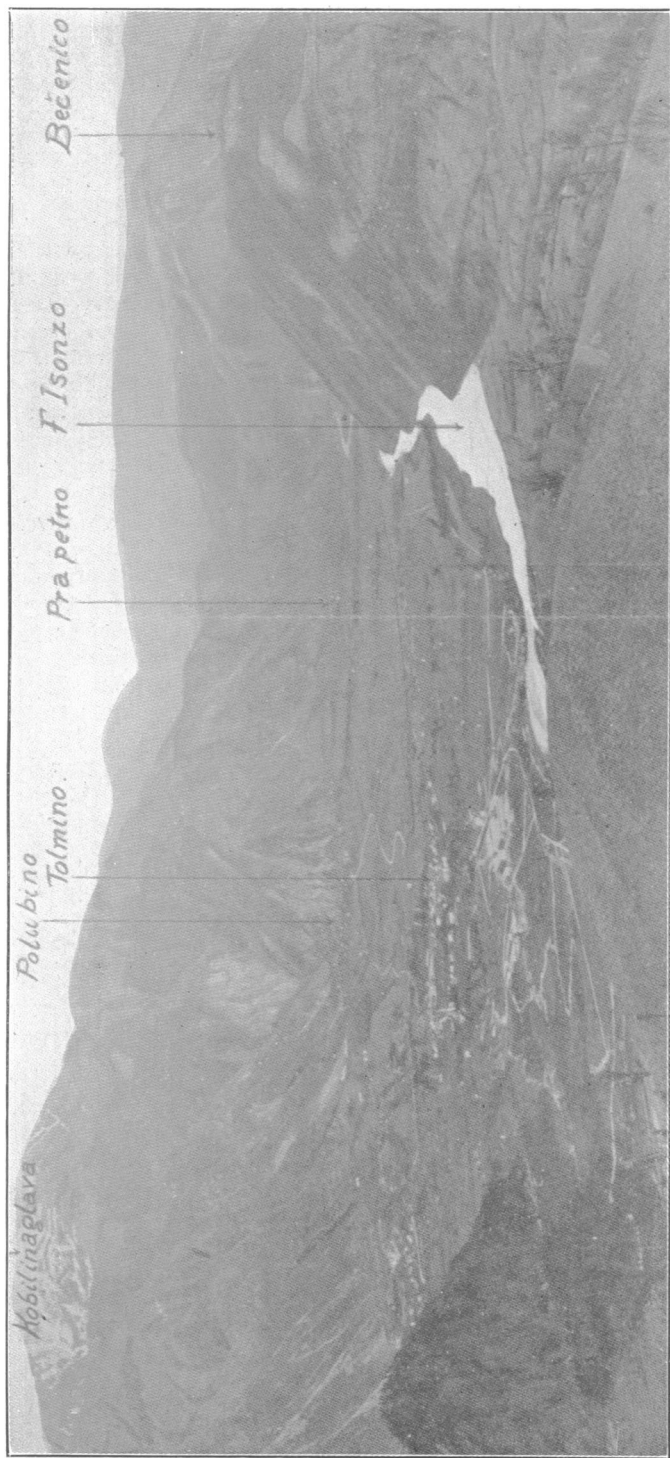
Italian left flank on the tableland of Asiago, where, if it had succeeded, the rearguard of the Italian army would have been cut, with Venice only forty miles away.

With the exception of this attack on the Asiago plateau, the military effort has been continuously employed on the eastern front. It was by far the most important, for here only was it possible to accomplish the objects which the Italians had in view. But the whole Isonzo basin was interposed between the frontier and the watershed and the advance could be made only with the greatest difficulties. The character of this region is shown in the two photographs which were exhibited by Major De Felippi and are reproduced from the report of his lecture. It was in the region of the Isonzo, shown in these pictures, that the German and Austrian troops attacked at the end of last October. Above Gorizia the Isonzo flows from north to south in a long narrow winding defile, which widens out at three points where side valleys reach it at Plezzo, Caporetto and Tolmino. These widenings of the valley were the scenes of the Austrian and German attack, through which their armies moved forward into the plains of Italy.

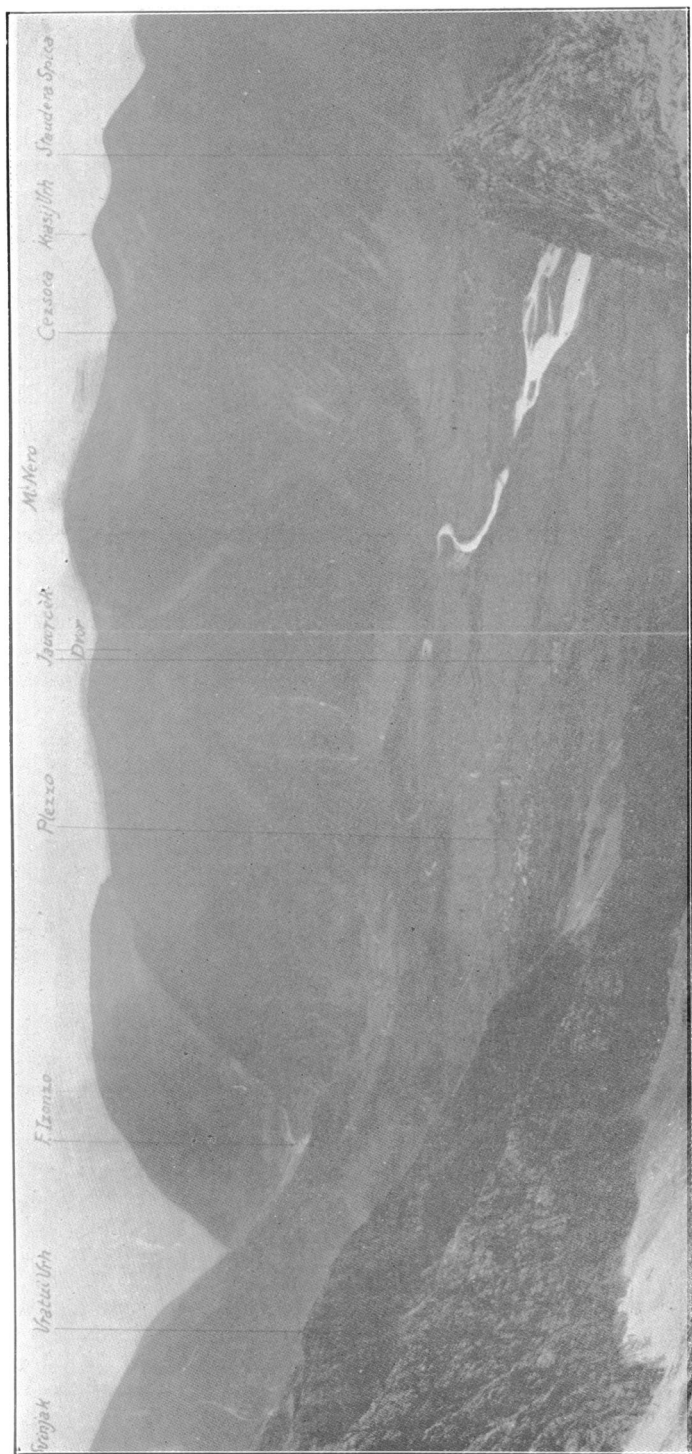
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE WAR

PLANS have been completed for the great enlargement of facilities for training and equipping the aerial photographic force for photographing the German trenches from the skies and keeping up to the last minute the large composite picture of the whole German front. Future facilities will be three times those at present existing and will be in full operation in April.

The three schools now operating at Langley Field, Fort Sill, and Cornell will be consolidated into one large school of aerial photography



VALLEY OF THE ISONZO AT TOLMINO.



VALLEY OF THE ISONZO AT PLEZZO

at Rochester, N. Y., where all the primary training will be done. Special equipment has been provided, with over 100 instructors. The present schools will be used for special and advanced training, particularly for the photographic intelligence officers who will accompany the planes into the air on special occasions. The bulk of the training, however, will be for the developing and printing work which must be done on a standardized plan, under processes specially developed during the war, and often in great haste on special motor lorries close to the front and to the staff. After a month's course, the men will be given a short advanced training and immediately sent overseas for operation in the American sector.

Aerial photography has greatly developed during the war. During the single month of September, British official reports state that 15,837 aerial photographs were taken by the British alone. No new trench can be dug, no new communication system opened up, no new batteries placed, but the ever-present and infallible camera above records it for the examination of the staff below. So piercing has been this work that camouflage has been developed as a protection, thus forcing aerial photography to even greater ingenuity.

Every sector of the front is divided into plots about half a mile square, each one numbered and entrusted to a squad of photographers who become fully familiar with it. As fast as the photographs are made they are developed, printed, reduced or enlarged to a standard scale, and then fitted into their place on the large composite photograph of the sector. This work requires a force of experts in developing, printing, and enlarging, as well as in map reading and interpretation. Cases are on record where only 20 minutes have elapsed from the time a photographer snapped his camera

over the German trenches until his batteries were playing upon the spot shown. In that time the airman had returned to his lines, the photograph been developed and printed, the discovery made, and the batteries given the range and ordered to fire.

SCIENTIFIC ITEMS

WE record with regret the death of Dr. Edmund Arthur Engler, for twenty years professor of mathematics at Washington University, and for ten years president of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute; Dr. Henry Maudsley, the British alienist and psychologist; of Sir John Wolfe Barry, the British civil engineer, and of Dr. Maryan Smoluchowski de Smolan, professor of physics at the University of Cracow.

BONDS and cash amounting to \$1,693,000 representing the trust fund established by Drs. Charles H. and William J. Mayo, of Rochester, the distinguished surgeons, for carrying on medical research work at the University of Minnesota, have been turned over to the state treasurer.—The Rockefeller Foundation has appropriated \$125,000 to continue the war demonstration hospital of the Rockefeller Institute, \$50,000 for the work of the medical division of the National Research Council of the Council of National Defense and \$12,281 for other medical war research and relief work.—It is expected that the new Field Museum, Chicago, for which ground was broken in the summer of 1915, will be ready for the transfer of the contents of the old museum in Jackson Park by August, 1919. The new building is situated south of Twelfth Street and east of the Illinois Central Station. It is of Georgia marble, and, exclusive of the porticoes, will measure 756 feet long and 350 feet wide. It will cost \$5,000,000.